
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

As part of its mission to share information about gangs, the New Jersey State Police Street Gang Bureau (SGB) collects information about gang activity, analyzes gang trends, identifies problem areas, and provides this information to a wide audience throughout the region. The SGB's understanding of New Jersey's gang problem relies upon investigations, the testimony of confidential sources of information, and estimates provided by the law enforcement community at large. One method of gauging the scope of gang activity in the state is to conduct periodic interviews of law enforcement agencies. Over the past decade, the New Jersey State Police (NJSP) has designed and executed several statewide gang surveys, most recently in 2001 and in 2004.

This is the first in a series of reports that will summarize the results of information provided by respondents to the 2001 and 2004 NJSP Gang Surveys. This document will present an overview of findings reported by members of municipal police departments who participated in the survey. Survey responses reflect the observations and opinions of individual officers, and were not independently verified by New Jersey State Police personnel. Partial corroboration of municipal survey response may be provided by the county agency data, which will be examined in a subsequent report.

This later report will examine the municipal responses grouped by county and will incorporate analysis of responses from county prosecutors' offices, county sheriffs' departments, and county correctional facilities. Finally, data from additional sources, such as the most recent U.S. Census, the Uniform Crime in New Jersey Report, and the New Jersey Department of Corrections will be compared to the survey results to determine whether trends can be identified regarding the scope and characteristics of gangs in New Jersey.

The following is a brief synopsis of significant findings from the 2001 and 2004 NJSP Gang Surveys:

- In both the 2001 and 2004 surveys, 33% of respondents noted the presence of gangs in their jurisdictions.
- In both years, survey respondents reported that at least 17% of homicides in New Jersey involved gang members.
- In 2001 and 2004, 70% of gang members were reported by respondents from Urban Centers.

In 2004:

- Municipal respondents identified 148 "distinct"¹ gangs present in New Jersey communities.
- 28 gangs in New Jersey have more than 100 members. Those 28 gangs account for 56% of all gang members within the state.

¹ See page 13 for a description of the term "distinct gangs."

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- Three gangs were consistently mentioned as the most serious problem, most actively recruiting, and most violent: the Bloods, Crips and Latin Kings.
 - Respondents reported a total of 532 gang related incidents in schools during the previous year.
 - 75% of responding agencies did not participate in a formal multi-agency task force or collaborative effort that focused on gangs
 - For agencies with a gang presence, 44% indicated that their community's gang problem had increased from the past year.
 - Only 26% of responding agencies reported having a computerized system for tracking crimes involving gang members. Only 7% required their personnel to contribute information to these systems.

Based on the findings contained in this report, we recommend the following:

- ❑ The Governor and the OAG should consider issuing an executive directive regarding the systematic collection of *gang-related crime data*. This may accelerate progress toward enactment of legislation on the topic.
- ❑ Until systematic gang-related crime data is available, the NJSP Gang Survey will continue to provide valuable strategic information about New Jersey's gang environment. The quality of data collection can be improved by outsourcing the questionnaire design, survey administration, and tabulation of the results to private sector opinion research contractors or academic research specialists.
- ❑ Since most agencies report that they do not currently participate in task forces on gangs, the OAG should continue to emphasize the value and importance of the task force approach to gang-crime enforcement.
- ❑ Law enforcement must actively partner with schools to ensure that educators are trained in recognizing gang activity in the schools. Lines of communication between law enforcement and the education community should be developed to foster the timely sharing of information. Additionally, data contained in the New Jersey Department of Education's Electronic Violence and Vandalism Reporting System should be analyzed to determine how gang related incidents in schools are reported.
- ❑ A multi-level law enforcement approach should be undertaken by the New Jersey Department of Corrections, State Parole Board, OAG, NJSP, Juvenile Justice Commission, Administrative Office of the Courts, and county prosecutors and sheriffs, to develop workable notification methods that link municipal police agencies with information they need about gang members released from jail and prison into their communities.
- ❑ More outreach should be directed toward communities that are unable to assess their gang problem. The NJSP Street Gang Bureau should develop a "template" gang assessment for municipalities that would enable them to draw on the knowledge of a wide range of community participants and synthesize that information in a comprehensive picture of their municipality's gang situation.